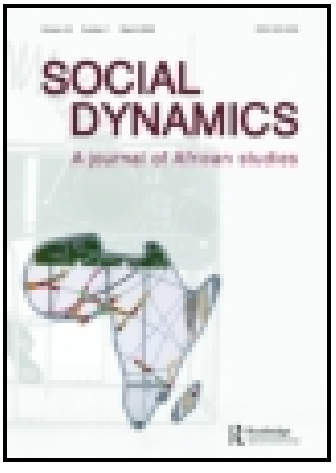

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"Divining" the city: rhythm, amalgamation and knotting as forms of "urbanity"

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CONFUSION OF FORM

"Divining" the city: rhythm, amalgamation and knotting as forms of "urbanity"

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Drawing on ethnographies of divinatory systems as well as on mathematical theories of the Möbius strip, this article unravels the complex weaving and knotting together of forms of sociality and survival in urban Congo. Inhabiting the urban, the author argues, requires strategies of amalgamation that resist being mapped linearly.

Keywords: Central Africa; Kinshasa; urban anthropology; divination; infrastructure

Introduction: on urban (dis)order

In the urbanscapes of Central Africa, and most notably in its largest city, Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, "disorder" and "confusion" are two notions that immediately come to mind to capture the rhythms and flows of the urban surface and the forms of life it generates. These concepts have not only been used analytically in the writings of social and political scientists, urban thinkers and policy-makers (cf. Chabal and Daloz 1999; Rakodi 2002; Trefon 2004; Urdal and Hoelscher 2009), but they also belong to the daily vocabularies of the residents who inhabit the unsteady terrains of urban life in this part of the world. Order, and to a great extent its opposite, "disorder," are terms commonly used by the members of Kinshasa's youth gangs, for example, to define themselves as "children of disorder" (*bana désordre*), and to describe the unruly "law" they impose upon the streets and neighbourhoods of Kinshasa (cf. De Boeck 2009). No doubt, these notions and experiences of an increasingly unruly urban world are by no means unique to Kinshasa. In the towns and cities of neighbouring Angola, for example, *confusão* is a word often used to describe the sense of increasing lack of direction and orientation that characterises everyday life in the urban context. In various other urban contexts across the continent and beyond, from Nairobi to Lagos, and Monrovia to Port-au Prince, one may discern the emergence of a similar social poetics of the disorderly, a growing incapacity to read meaning into the urban site, to understand the rules that govern life beyond the immediate surface of its chaotic appearance, and to give that life a purpose and finality other than mere survival. Many of these

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cities have indeed been formed in and through analogous historical processes of colonisation, exploitation, brutal sovereignty and unbridled economic liberalisation, but in each of these urban contexts such histories have come together in unique ways to give rise to specific urban formations and original urban residues. Kinshasa, for example, sprang from a Leopoldian comptoir economy, was formatted by an intrusive and segregationist Belgian colonialism, became deeply scarred by three decades of ruinous Mobutist reign and is now in the process of being redefined through the violence of global neoliberal investments that drastically redraw the city's geographies of inclusion and exclusion. Because of its tumultuous history and its current size, Kinshasa is often referred to as "the quintessential postcolonial African city" (Pieterse 2010, 1) and it has often been regarded as paradigmatic for emerging urban worlds elsewhere on the continent and in the Global South. In this text, however, I will refrain from making broader comparative moves, and stick to the ethnographic context of Kinshasa itself.

Within this setting, I would like to reflect on the "form" of Kinshasa's urban confusion and disorder, a form that often seems to be shaped, driven and spurred by the force of "searching" (Lingala: *koluka*), the capacity of citydwellers to "look for," to be on the outlook, to blaze a trail in the city and trailblaze oneself into the next moment of daily urban life. In doing so, I will attempt to link Central African cultural repertoires of divination to intensified logics of amalgamation and "knotting" among Kinshasa residents as they navigate the sheer turbulence of everyday life, illustrated by fluctuations of electricity, social resources, the structuring of urban space and its multiple temporalities, indeed the living forms and infrastructures of urban life themselves. As such, my reflection offers a phenomenological glimpse of the implicit ontological transformations of social connectivity and disconnectivity informing "fractal" patterns of social flows and blockages, intensified by the exponential impact of cell phones, for example. Within this richly textured cityscape, the ties that bind both heal, as in the suture, but also hinder and constrain, providing fertile ground for contemporary diviners (and basically this includes everyone living in the city, for all urban residents are experience experts in "reading" and interpreting the unpredictabilities of city life) to re-assemble social subjects and the contexts which they seek to predict, master and steer.

Koluka: searching in/for the city

An often heard phrase in Kinshasa is "I don't see clear" (Lingala: *namoni clair te*), or *eza trouble*: "it (and this 'it' might be a specific event as well as one's reading of it) is murky," i.e. indistinct, turbid, disturbed and indeed "troubled." In Congo's urban context, people routinely translate this sense of confusion into the word *mystique* (or *mistik*). People, things and situations in urban Congo are commonly designated "mystique," that is to say, difficult to place, interpret and fully fathom or understand. As one of the organising tropes of Central Africa's cityscapes, the word "mystique" seems to capture rather well the overall quality of urban existence in all of its opaqueness and elusiveness, its often uncanny nature and ontological ambivalence. It conveys well the draining nature of the demands the city places on its residents, and indicates their constant intensive efforts to overcome the city's disorder and its ensuing ambiguities; the work of having to engage in an almost daily "divinatory" act in order to read meaning into the fluid parameters of urban life, to unveil the city's unreliability, to steer clear of its many unpredictable events and

remain unharmed throughout the day, and to make sense of one's own pathways of adversity or luck. This daily labour is often structured around the activity of "searching" (Lingala: *koluka*), a term commonly used by urbanites to describe their daily quest for food, money, jobs, contacts and opportunities. Although one can easily lose oneself in this often desperate "searching for (the good) life" (*koluka vie*), it simultaneously involves the interpretive capacity or possibility to read meaning and opportunity into the gaps that invariably open up between, or even within, things, events and persons. These gaps constitute the essential quality of unpredictability that defines this kind of urban life. Due to the influence of neo-Pentecostal and other religious vocabularies, the impossibility to foretell or foresee what today and tomorrow will bring is itself often translated into terms of "fate," "the occult" or the "miraculous" (see also Goldstone 2011 on the latter).

Divining urban rhythms: the city as limit-experience

As a basic structure of feeling and experience, to paraphrase Williams (1977), the *form* of this "mystique" permeating urban topographies could best be described as *rhythm*; the rhythms, paces, tones and echoes pulsating through the city's social life and its accompanying acts of *koluka*; the quickenings and thickenings of time and people that shape the surface of everyday life, with its releases and restraints, its sudden opportunities and eternal postponements, its ejaculations and constipations.

City life often shapes up around the rhythms of the syncopated, the suspended, the unexpected and the excessive. In part, it is the city's physical condition itself that imposes these specific rhythms on its inhabitants, through the "simulacra of infrastructure" (De Boeck and Plissart 2004, 226) and the "ruinations" (Stoler 2008) that constitute the city's material landscapes. As many have pointed out, infrastructure is usually invisible, i.e. taken for granted and therefore largely unnoticed until it breaks down, at which point it becomes very present in its absence. The switches between the absence and presence, or between the visibility and invisibility of infrastructure, are of a complex and unpredictable nature, and therefore involve a whole "range of visibilities" (Larkin 2013, 336).

In Kinshasa, a reality that exemplifies this to the full is that of the city's electricity supply, which consists of the infamous system of *délestage* that SNEL, the national electricity company, applies throughout most, if not all, parts of the city. *Délestage* means that electricity is switched off in one neighbourhood during certain hours or days in order to feed other sectors in the city instead. The problem is that the rhythm of these cuts is totally unpredictable and apparently random. Some areas receive electricity most of the time, most receive electricity some of the time (though at hours that vary every day and never for the same duration) and some neighbourhoods or even streets within a neighbourhood do not receive any electricity for days, weeks or even months. And then there are the numerous neighbourhoods that are not even connected to the city's electricity network. All these varying rhythms of electricity supply in turn generate their own informal forms of networking. Not only do people start to "bend" the power lines towards their own compounds and tap electricity from official poles and cables, but the unsteady rhythm of the electricity supply and the instability of the electric current itself (often worsened by this informal bending) also sets in motion a carousel of people in search of light to read or write, of power for a refrigerator or to get a generator to work, or simply seeking an opportunity to connect a laptop or watch a soccer game on TV. In the streets of

every neighbourhood, numerous shops equipped with privately owned generator sets provide a possibility to leave one's cell phone behind in the morning and to pick it up again in the evening with recharged batteries. Watching TV often becomes a collective street happening when the lucky owner of a TV set *and* a generator puts the TV out in the street. The technological gaps, absences and silences that so strongly characterise the syncopated nature of the city's public infrastructure, thus also generate new spheres of social interaction and new coping strategies.

The suspensions and missed beats occasioned by the staccato rhythms and the outages the city imposes upon its inhabitants, thus also offer the possibility to discover, explore and invent unexpected accents that form openings into the "something else" of the off-beat track. But above all, they generate interminable questions of an almost divinatory nature, if only because people constantly try to search for the reasons behind, in this particular case, the unsteady power supply. And, as is common protocol in a divinatory ritual séance, they try to come up with a causal explanation for present wrongs by tracing them back to (a chain of) events in the past. Such establishments of complex aetiological grids form spontaneous attempts to individuate the city's (and the state's) dysfunctionalities and thereby re-assemble, understand and transform their disjointed and often random nature: Why does the street next to ours receive electricity, and we do not? Why did SNEL decide to switch our electricity regime from a couple of hours per day to half a day every week? Which neighbour could possibly have influenced that decision? Why does he hold a grudge against us? Did we (I, my wife, my children, my cousin, my uncle?) possibly do something to upset him, and if so, what could that have been? Or did someone in the neighbourhood anger the authorities? Isn't the next-door neighbour rumoured to be sleeping with the wife of the personal assistant of the local sector's director of SNEL? And isn't the other neighbour politically active in a party that opposes the party to which the minister responsible for the electricity company belongs? Could that be why thieves always steal our street's electricity cables? If not, who else sent them?

What this illustrates is that the form of the city is not only imposed by the rhythms of the city's failing material infrastructures and the "confusion" that the decrepit nature of this infrastructure constantly generates, but that its form is as much shaped by mental and social landscapes. As Stoler (2008) remarks, ruinations simultaneously are about "the material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things. Such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the micro-ecologies of matter and mind" (194). Since the city is rhythm, the urban form is often also that of a verbal and musical architecture. A lot could be said here about the importance of rhetoric in order to exist in the city as well as to build the city (De Boeck 2011). Similarly, in the Congolese context, and particularly in the context of Kinshasa, both the historical material form and the lived form of the city are shaped by its music. In Central Africa, the city has generated a new form of music, the *rumba ya lingala* that came of age with Franco and Tabu Ley, while simultaneously generating the novel form of the city, with its new iconic spaces (such as bars) and its new time regimes (of labour and leisure). In their current shape, the vibrating rhythms of the city's music and the verbality of its lyrics seem to perfectly match the rumblings and explosions of the city's things. A "precarious balance between noise, sound and scream" (Mbembe 2006, 76), Kinshasa's music expands and contracts with strong and often irregular movements, while the shouts of the *atalakus* fluctuate between the hopeful and the

abject. Their voices stop the flux of the city and break time open into a splintering moment of meeting bodies. Hard, sharp, metallic and fragmented, this music does not only constitute the perfect soundtrack to accompany the disorderly and contradictory nature of the city, but it *is* the city itself, it moors and "scapes" the city in what Binyavanga Wainana describes so well as "the sound of all the clang, the rang-tang-tang, tinny clamour of agitated building, selling, and the multilingual clash of mouth cymbals, lifting up and down, jaws working, eating, trading, laughing" (Wainaina 2011, 77).

The often disjointed infrastructural figments and fragments that make up the urban landscape are thus embedded in other rhythms and temporalities, in totally different layers of socially networked infrastructures, punctuated by varying spatial, temporal and affective oscillations between connectedness and disconnection, situated in the waxing and waning movements between foreground and back- or underground, between surface, fold and gap, between the visible and the invisible, darkness and light, movement and motionlessness, continuity and discontinuity, flow and blockage, opening and closure. As such, urban living is ceaselessly rhythmed by its excesses and scarcities; its dispersals and immobilisations; its homogeneity and heterogeneity; its total boundlessness and the totalitarian nature of its endless restrictions; its frequent moments of violent effervescence and the boredom of endless waiting that also characterise urban life.

To navigate successfully through all these contradictions, the impossible possibilities and the impromptu changes of pace and rhythm that urban life constantly generates, demands judgement and improvisational skills that Kinois (Kinshasa's inhabitants) commonly refer to as *matematik*, "mathematics." And indeed, to steer your life unscathed through all the pitfalls, all the possible constantly changing parameters of your daily existence seems to demand an advanced knowledge of higher mathematics and matters such as chaos, fractals, mobility and vectorial capacity in order to attain a deep insight into the complex dynamics of (social) transmission.[1] A great deal of perseverance, courage and tactical skills is needed to live the city's "limit-experience" in the Foucauldian sense of an experience which, in terms of its intensity and its seeming impossibility, takes one to life's edge by "seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, that it is brought to its annihilation or its demolition" (Foucault quoted in Sluga 2005, 224). That is also why people, in their quest to convert this living on the edge into something more enduring, turn to ritual specialists for assistance and help. Although this role has been taken up in radically transformed ways to a considerable extent by the preachers and pastors of Kinshasa's Pentecostal churches, more long-standing divinatory traditions and techniques also continue to be used (through often in very transformed ways so as to adapt to the specific problems people face in the urban context, and in response to the open-endedness of the city itself).[2]

Take, for example, the case of Makila, a policeman I met some years ago in Sans Fil ("Wireless"), the name of a neighbourhood in the municipality of Masina, where I have conducted research for many years, and where Makila was assigned to a local police station.[3] When off-duty, Makila lived with his family in a small compound in Bibwa on the eastern outskirts of Kinshasa. In 2012, when I paid a visit to his house, Makila introduced me to a Suku diviner who lived nearby, after telling me how they had met for the first time some years earlier.[4,5] One night, Makila, together with another policeman, had to guard a car that they had confiscated and had parked it in front of the local police station in Sans Fil. The two policemen fell asleep and

when they woke up a couple of hours later the car was gone. As a result, Makila himself was accused by his superiors of having stolen the car. He was arrested and jailed. From prison he managed to send a message to his wife, asking her to contact the diviner in question and ask for help. Makila's wife hurried to the diviner's house and during the ensuing divinatory session, the diviner traced the whereabouts of the stolen car, or at least, he told the wife in which specific neighbourhood of the city the car could probably be located, adding that, in all likelihood, it had by now been repainted another colour. With this information, and after a search that lasted three days, Makila's wife and her sister managed to find the stolen vehicle (which had not only been repainted but its motor had already been sold) near to the area that the diviner had indicated. As a result of this successful search, Makila was released and the real culprits of the car theft were arrested. Ever since then, the diviner continues to play an important role in many of the decisions Makila has to make on a daily basis in his private and professional life. And judging from the number of visitors who were waiting to consult the diviner every time I visited him in his compound, Makila is by no means an exception. Whatever the situation may be (illness, misfortune, witchcraft attacks, professional setbacks, troubled marriages, problematic relationships, the weight of city life, etc.), the divinatory oracle identifies and re-formulates the problem in question by embedding it in a different, less closed and more constructive narrative that always suggests the possibility of agency, that of acting upon and thereby transforming and opening up the problematic limit-experience that is responsible for "wrenching the subject from itself" (Foucault quoted in Sluga 2005, 224). This revelatory breaking open of the problem at hand and the suggestion of a possible line of action counters the subject's breaking away from itself; it brings one back to oneself, and reconfigures the (social) boundaries between oneself and the surrounding world. This is what Silva describes so beautifully when she states that through (basket) divination, objectified individuals (with "objectification" she means "the sense of existential powerlessness, uncertainty and diminution") undertake an attempt to de-objectify themselves (Silva 2011, 6). In other words, a divinatory consultation allows them to re-insert themselves into the world in an alternative way and through a transformative ritual movement, as properly re-assembled subjects. It has to be noted that the diviner also undergoes a similar transformation. This happens during an initiatory trance possession that Devisch, in the context of Yaka divinatory rituals, describes as a form of "self delivery" or "auto release" (2013, 36). In other words, to become a diviner one first has to become "ill," i.e. become "possessed" by the divining spirit, *ngoombu* or *ngombo*. And this "illness," this "suffering" that can best be described as an experience of self dispersal, of being "wrenched" from oneself, of being annihilated and, indeed, "objectified" in Silva's sense, is a necessary moment in order to be able to de-objectify afterwards. Interestingly, the Yaka term for this initiatory trance possession or moment of self dispersal is *kaluka* (Devisch 2013, 36ff), which etymologically links the initiatory trance experience of a diviner (a moment that also involves his "searching" for a hidden object in order to prove his clairvoyant capacities – see also De Boeck and Devisch 1994) to the way in which urban residents move "searchingly" (*koluka*) through the city, as explained above.

In the end, what do divinatory practices tell us specifically about the *form* of the urban drive, and the particular energies of suffering, disillusionment, ailing, healing and hope that run through the city?

Rhythms of amalgamation, and knots as limit-situation

The urban world is characterised by the specific nature of the chaotic rhythms that determine people's lives within the urban terrain, with all of its "bumpy incoherent surfaces and inexplicable narrow bottlenecks" (Guyer 2011, 477); by the complex divisions and/or conflations of space, time, frequency and code that make and mark the form of urban life; and by the multiple modes of transference, channelling, networking (or *branchement* as Congolese are more likely to call it). This has given rise to a myriad of metaphors and images that social scientists, architects and urban planners have tried to apply to capture analytically the often paradoxical and rarely uni-directional or teleological movements the city undergoes, or to describe the thick layeredness of matter and time that characterises the form that urban existence takes on. Think, for example, of the notion of "entanglement" advanced by Nuttall (2009), of Amselle's (2001) *branchements*, of Tsing's (2005) connections and articulations in global zones of engagement, of "assemblage" (McFarlane 2011), or of the forms of the rhizomatically non-orientable, the palimpsestual, or the multiplex, to name but a few. What all of these forms and notions seem to have in common and share with each other is the quality (or process) of *amalgamation*, i.e. of combining or uniting multiple entities into one form.

In Central African cultural registers, the ideas of amalgamation and combination have always been expressed by the form of the knot and through processes of knotting, tying, connecting, weaving and intertwining (De Boeck 1991). As "limit situations," (and here I borrow the term from Eliade 1952) knots are both conjuncts and disjuncts. They may simultaneously express the idea of interlinking, connecting, border crossing and the transposition of meaning from one field to another. Or they might, on the contrary, express acts or states of disconnection, of the untying of integrative links. They may also represent closure, blockage and suffocation. Throughout large parts of Central Africa, the notion of the knot and the act of knotting are often used as metaphors to express states of physical health, social well-being, physical and social reproduction and, more metaphorically, acts of "world-making," i.e. the establishment and replenishing of social and cultural orders (e.g. through ritual). But the notion of the knot might also simultaneously express and denote the opposite of all this: it might refer to physical illness, bondage and slavery, social disintegration, witchcraft, conflict and death. In many Bantu languages, words connoting the form of the knot or the idea of interlinking often derive from the proto-Bantu **-dungu.* The notion of "underworld" (*kalunga*) or the name commonly given to the idea of a Supreme Being or energetic force-field (*nzambi mpungu*) throughout Central Africa, shares this same proto-Bantu root. Similarly, the idea of life and life force itself (*mooyi* or variations thereof) is conceptualised in terms of the joining or knotting together of male and female complementary opposites.

I suggest that the knot, as a polymorphic form of amalgamation and as "limit situation," perfectly captures the rhythm of the city's limit-experiences. It offers us the material form of an autochthonous conceptual meta-discourse about the specific nature of the rhythm of (urban) life. (It should be noted that acts of knotting and weaving in this particular cultural setting are, above all, about balance, rhythm and the (corporeal) rhythming of the world. This necessitates a more elaborate ethnography, but good starting points to ethnographically ground this idea would be Devisch (1993); for example, or Geurts (2002) (see also You 1994).

Suturing the city: divinatory knots, Möbius strips and Borromean rings

Knots bring us back again to processes of divination and to the divinatory apparatus itself, to the baskets or bags that diviners in this part of the world always used (see also Laranjeira Rodrigues de Areia 1985; Turner 1975), and, as the case above illustrates, continue to use in the urban context. Like urban existence itself, these containers consist of a border-crossing amalgamation of various objects, materials and substances of human, animal and vegetal origin. Though often in a more underground way because of the hegemony of neo-Pentecostalist discourses and practices, diviners continue to operate in the city, and they have amalgamated and "knotted" the city into their baskets by incorporating many of the commodities or objects the urban world produces (e.g. photos, locks, plastic dolls, car parts, and many other items such as batteries or cell phone parts) that metonymically represent the "modern" urban world. These allow the diviner to say something about the impact of that world upon one's physical and mental state.[6] Secondly, they allow the diviner (who often also acts as healer of the identified problems) to exert a transformative influence upon the world by opening up possible therapeutic paths and suggesting possible (ritual) ways to counter and undo, to "untie" and "unknot" the blockages in one's life.

That is again why the inalienable part of the material object repertoire of the baskets that diviners use during their divinatory séances all over southern Congo and large parts of northern Angola and Zambia is a particular form of knot, known as *kata* (a Cokwe word that refers to entwinement, enclosure, as well as the idea of rupture). In the divinatory context, this particular *kata* is of crucial importance as a representation of the rhythms of the flow of life, energy, breath and vitality (Figures 1 and 2). The knot in question has a Möbius-shaped form, consisting of spooled-up

Figure 1. *Kata*, the inalienable part of the divination baskets that are used throughout Southern Congo, Angola and Zambia.
Source: From the author's collection. Photo: Filip De Boeck.

Figure 2. *Kata* as part of a Shiinji divination basket, Southern Kwango, DRC.
Source: From the author's collection. Photo: Filip De Boeck.

strips of palm leaves, which are woven into a single whole. These knots often appear in pairs, representing the knot's double nature (of flow and closure, etc. – see above).

Webster describes the Möbius strip or band as

> a mathematical object, or a physical representation of it, which is a two-dimensional sheet with only one surface. It is constructed or visualized as a rectangle, one end of which is held fixed while the opposite end is twisted through a 180-degree angle and joined to the fixed end. It is a two-dimensional object that can only exist in a three-dimensional space.

Although the divinatory knot is a not pure Möbius shape, given that on close inspection its two surfaces reveal that it has more than one side and one boundary component, it still seems to share the Möbius strip's mathematical property of being non-orientable and endless or without origin. When one looks closely at the divinatory knot, one can see there *is* an origin, a specific starting point for the winding of the various layers of the parallel lines that are woven into a knot, but this origin cannot easily be perceived, it is "forgotten," and therefore the knot seems to be realised as a ruled surface, i.e. a surface in affine space (and an affine space is what is left of a vector space after one has forgotten which point is the origin).

In other words, such a Möbius-like shape or geometric structure forms a translation or permutation of the Euclidian map, generalising the affine properties (the properties of parallel lines) within Euclidian space, offering projective maps to chart the particular rhythms of parallel, spiralling and yet intersecting lines without origin or end.

Such a Möbius form therefore seems to fit and describe the plane of the city rather well; its unsteady topology and the miraculous unfolding of the non-orientable lines of people's lives within it. Non-orientable because never straight, these lives

can indeed for the most part be described as deviations of straightness, always opening up to the unexpected, with all the "mathematics" that living in constant confusion and improvisation entails. Translating the necessity to connect and knot yourself into as many networks as possible, the knot also expresses the possible dangers that every connection may bring. Here, the divinatory knot refers less to the structural properties of the Möbius ring, which so greatly inspired someone like Lévi-Strauss, but it brings us closer to the topological operation of inter-knotting that the Borromean rings represented for Lacan: Urban living in the shape of a constant attempt at finding ways to "stitch" lacks and losses together, to revert to the Lacanian notion of *suture*. Sutures suggest the possibility of closing wounds, generating realignments and opening up alternatives, because sutures also point to new kinds of creativity with (spatial and temporal) beginnings, and therefore with new forms of interactivity, as Hunt (2013) reminds us. The lack needs, and demands, to be overcome in order to survive and form a collectivity in the city. But the same lack also constantly drives individual and collective desire, and therefore the very rhythm of the city itself, as dream and nightmare, the theatre of rise and fall.

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Notes

1. As Eglash (1999) illustrates, fractal geometry has always been a part of African settlement infrastructures and its social worlds. On fractal patterning and the extension of mathematics into ordinary life within African contexts also see Verran (2001) and Zaslavsky (1973).
2. In recent years, some forms of divination have (re)surfaced in very visible ways in the city. This is the case, for example, during funerals, and especially if the deceased is a young person. During the funeral procession towards the cemetery, a divinatory ritual is carried out on the corpse by the deceased's friends. The dead person will be asked to direct the carriers of the coffin to the house of the person responsible for the "eating" of the deceased. This often leads to violent attacks against the family elders of the deceased (cf. De Boeck 2010).
3. The name Makila is a pseudonym.
4. Together with the Bakongo from the Lower Congo province, the Yaka and other related ethnic groups (such as the Suku) from Kinshasa's adjacent Kwango district constitute a major demographic presence in Kinshasa. On the forms and specific protocols of divination as practised in this Yaka socio-cultural sphere (see, e.g. De Boeck and Devisch 1994; Devisch 2013).
5. Depending on their ethnic background, diviners may also be women, as among the Yaka. However, whereas this is still commonly the case in rural settings (see, e.g. Dumon and Devisch 1991), it seems to have become much more of an exception in Kinshasa, where I have only encountered two female diviners over the past 10 years.
6. Even in daily life, the colloquial Lingala spoken in Kinshasa expresses ideas of physical and mental well-being through the use of similar analogies. In this way, one can be said to be *low-bat* ("have a low battery") when one feels drained of energy. Similarly, a mentally disturbed person is said to be *na ba-réseaux*: "s/he has (too many) networks (in his/

her head)," like cell phones with several SIM cards that people tend to use to switch between different providers, a *conditio* sine qua non to branch out, and to extend and stretch your social networks as far as possible in order to heighten your chances of survival and success in the city.

Notes on contributor

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